

BOOK REVIEWS

McClure, Ellen M. *Sunspots and the Sun King: Sovereignty and Mediation in Seventeenth-Century France*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006. ISBN 978-0-252-03056-7. Pp. 316. \$50.00

In chapter 4 of *Le Roman comique*, one of Scarron's characters takes a nighttime trip "to the place where kings must go in person." Scarron's circumlocution poses in immediately felt terms the problem of representation at the heart of Ellen McClure's erudite and agile revisiting of the question of divine right in *Sunspots and the Sun King*, a book that will interest scholars of early modern literature, history, and political philosophy. McClure uncovers the tensions, uncertainties, and making do that informed the articulation of divine right monarchy that has come to represent Louis XIV's absolutism as much as the emblem of the Sun King—which, as the author reminds us, was not an unproblematic symbol of royal perfection given Galileo's recent discovery of sunspots. It is this tacking back and forth between theory and practice, the ideal and the real, in questions about the mediation and delegation of power that, McClure convincingly argues, defined seventeenth-century France's response to sovereignty after the political and religious upheavals of the preceding century (notably the Reformation) forced a rethinking of the relationship between state, subjects, and the divine. And it is this same tacking between theory and practice, in such domains as the writing of Louis XIV's memoirs and the diplomatic conflicts of his reign, which comprises one of this study's myriad strengths. Thawing the ideological block of divine right monarchy, McClure undertakes to "[reassess] the dominant discourse of legitimacy" by revealing the "fundamental contradiction between agency and dependency at the very heart of state power" (11).

Fueling McClure's dynamic vision of power is the concept of mediation, "signify[ing] the movement of power and authority from the divine *through* its royal instrument" (and from the sovereign through the sovereign's instruments), which the author analyzes in political treatises, royal memoirs, diplomatic history, and theater (7). If McClure prefers "mediation" to "representation" in order, as she explains, to avoid the latter term's anachronistic connotations of popular political authority and positive self-interest, her concept of mediation is equally important in providing scholars of absolutism with a relational language of power. McClure's analyses introduce a needed sense of movement and tension to static formulations of the power effects of royal representation in text and image. Privileging mediation over representation, McClure distances herself from the theoretical model furnished by Louis Marin's "portrait du

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roi” (and behind this model, Ernst Kantorowicz’s theory of the king’s two bodies), which performs the Eucharistic-like transformation of the king’s physical and political bodies into a sacramental/semiotic body through representation. At the same time, sovereignty for McClure becomes a more vexed undertaking when it is no longer resolved in the baroque “coup d’état” but operated through time and space and mediated through a variety of human agents.

McClure’s first two chapters are concerned with the origins of sovereignty and the role of the monarch in early modern political treatises and the memoirs authored by Louis XIV and his team of writers. In her insightful reading of Jean Bodin’s *Les six livres de la république* ... against the backdrop of other sixteenth-century political thinkers, sovereignty becomes a linguistic act—an act of definition as indivisible and independent as definition itself. Arguing that seventeenth-century writers such as Cardin Le Bret, Jean-François Senault, and Pierre Le Moyne formulated divine right as a means of reforging the ties between God, monarch, and subjects that Bodin had severed, McClure proceeds through a deft analysis of the vocabulary and images deployed by these writers to describe the composite nature of the sovereign and mediate between the divine and the human. She pursues questions of authority and language in a valuable chapter on Louis XIV’s memoirs, which places the king’s singular enterprise of life-writing in the context of other model texts as well as royal panegyric that both celebrated the undertaking and reinforced the mystique of kingship through “a conscious refusal to scrutinize the inner workings of the monarchy” (71). Close readings combined with illuminating analysis of omissions and corrections in the memoir manuscripts reveals the tensions involved in the articulation of the royal “je” who takes the place of God as creator and doer of his text/kingdom—thereby correcting the erasing of individual royal agency operated by divine right—yet remains “an individual constantly attempting to inhabit this position” in the text (82–83).

Expanding her focus on God and the sovereign, McClure explores issues of authority and delegation in a series of power couples that reproduce and complicate the tensions of the original duo: the sovereign and the diplomat (chapters three and four) and the playwright and the actor (chapter five). McClure links discussions of the role of the diplomat—a fraught question given the rise of international law, the growth and centralization of states, and the inadequate ideal of the ambassador of Christian peace—to the problems of mediation and “betweenness” raised by divine right. She shows how concepts of sovereignty were played out

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both in treatises on diplomacy and in the diplomatic controversies of Louis XIV's reign (the 1661 conflict over *préseance* with the Spanish ambassador in London and the 1662 humbling of the pope after a diplomatic fracas caused by a street brawl in Rome). If Louis XIV won (at what cost?) these diplomatic stand-offs, the potential menace of the diplomat's individuality and person, which McClure finds woven through early modern reflections on diplomacy, is fully realized in those troublesome ambassadors in theater, Oreste and Suréna, who animate scenarios of mediation deviated or blocked by the subject's passions and the body's attractions. McClure's nuanced readings of theatrical figures of mediation in her last chapter—Racine's and Corneille's unlucky ambassadors, Rotrou's actor Genest—shows how the theater brought questions of legitimacy and originality to bear upon the subject as much as the sovereign. The conflicts of authorship and influence inherent in theater, which McClure adroitly unravels in warring texts of the *querelle du Cid* and in seventeenth-century considerations of the role of the actor, magnify the challenges of the king who, like the playwright, seeks to define his own creativity and agency against the forces that would erase or corrupt his action.

McClure's expert readings, ranging over an impressive scope of sources, reaffirm the importance of literary analysis in studying early modern formulations of the political in theory and practice. Particularly suggestive are the instances where, through the idiosyncrasies of bodies—the actor's voice or the king's hand counterfeited by his secretaries—McClure signals the possibility of a failure of mediation. A valuable addition to scholarship on absolutism, theater, and authorship, this compelling treatment of mediation shows writers, political thinkers, diplomats, and the king wrestling with the modalities of the delegation of absolute power through its limited instruments.

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Wilkin, Rebecca. *Women, Imagination and the Search for Truth in Early Modern France*. Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7546-6138-2. Pp. 243. \$114.95

This rich, erudite study addresses “the deployment of gender distinctions by early modern intellectuals in order to define truth and to legitimate particular means of attaining [it]” (7). The organization of the book is original. While Wilkin traces a general movement in early mod-

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ern French thought from hermeneutics to ethics to epistemology “proper,” she interweaves arguments in order to avoid an overly linear presentation. And whereas many studies of early modern philosophy begin with Descartes, Wilkin ends with him, referring to his work throughout as “a confrontation of positive and skeptical modes of seeing” (2). This confrontation is a recurrent thread in the book; “positive” authors tend to denigrate women, while skeptical writers reverse gender hierarchies in order to undermine rigid philosophical or religious systems.

Although her work acknowledges and builds upon the contributions of feminist research, Wilkin’s perspective differs from her predecessors’ in two important ways. First, she claims that “through the exclusion of women, [male writers] articulated the limits of the search for truth and sought to ensure their privileged place within it” (2). In other words, the male-authored works she analyses, though they seemingly deal with women, are not really “about” the female sex but about epistemology and power. Second, Wilkin criticizes earlier feminist analyses that, according to her, “have stressed the sexist ideology behind the emergence of a monolithic and masculine enterprise” (7). She does not deny—indeed, it would be impossible to do so—that misogyny was a dominant discourse in early modern society. However, she asserts it was not the monolith it is sometimes imagined to be. For example, misogynistic views were employed both to attack and to defend witchcraft trials. Wilkin asserts that these contradictory representations of women “speak ... to the fragility of human confidence in its claims to knowledge” (1).

Each of the book’s five chapters focuses on one or two authors. The first two chapters examine the epistemological implications of the witchcraft debates of the mid and late 16th century, beginning with Johann Weyer’s “*De praestigis daemonum*.” Weyer (1515–88), a Swiss Protestant physician, argued that witches should not be tortured or prosecuted because their alleged diabolical acts are merely illusions, fabricated by Satan and imposed on the minds of poor, weak females. Because of their predisposition to melancholia, women are more susceptible to demonic possession than men—a claim that runs counter to other views associating melancholy with *male* genius (13). According to Weyer, “that crafty schemer the Devil thus influences the female sex, which by reason of temperament is inconstant, credulous, wicked, uncontrolled in spirit and ... melancholic” (11). No feminist, Weyer’s apparent lenience toward accused witches is based on his low opinion of women. According to Wilkin, Weyer’s main purpose is not to save women from persecution, but to enhance his own prestige as a physician. By “demonizing” witches

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(and women in general) as ignorant, illiterate and gullible, he underscores the physician's privileged access to knowledge. Rather than hidden within the female body, truth is in plain sight for those who can see clearly—like physicians. However, Weyer's "epistemology of surfaces" (8) leaves him open to critics such as Jean Bodin.

In contrast to Weyer's literalist epistemology, Bodin's hermeneutics are "tortuous" in their insistence on the need to extract hidden meanings from nature. Like Augustine and his later disciple Pascal, "Bodin viewed everything as a text in need of interpretation" (57). Furthermore, torture, specifically the torture of women accused of witchcraft, lies at the heart of Bodin's truth-seeking. By gendering nature as a female who will not give up her secrets easily, he validates the use of violent means to find what is hidden. In this ideology, the "mastery" of nature ends in its destruction by human (masculine) action.

Politics and demonology are linked in Bodin's thought by an imperative to subordinate women to men. In *Six Livres de la republique* (1576), the model for absolutism is the submission of the wife to the husband, whereas in *De la Demonomanie des sorciers* (1580), witchcraft is defined as "divine treason" because it shows insubordination to both man (if most witches are considered female) and to God. While both works reveal Bodin's deep misogyny, neither his political theory nor his demonology is really *about* women (53), no more than Weyer's work had been. Weyer had portrayed women as weak and susceptible to delusions in order to strengthen his authority as a physician. While completely opposed to Weyer's argument, Bodin uses a similar strategy to shore up the marginal position of provincial magistrates, who had criticized the Paris parlement for its leniency towards accused witches: "the extraction of the witches' confession allows for the demonstration of the magistrate's hermeneutical prowess" (74). In both cases, women are mere counters in a skeptical/epistemological debate and a struggle for power.

This theme is recast in chapter 3, which deals with the neo-Stoic response to the intellectual and political crisis of the late Renaissance. Wilkin adds the element of gender to this mix, arguing that masculinity becomes an unstable category in the writings of the neo-Stoics. Guillaume du Vair defends the "masle" virtues of strength and constancy shown by the *politiques*, who had been vilified as effeminate by their League opponents. At the same time, he reviles the Catholic Leaguers as "womanish." For the neo-Stoic Du Vair, masculine characteristics are still portrayed as positive, feminine as negative. But unlike Weyer and Bodin, du Vair does not found these gender oppositions solely on anatomical differences;

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rather, gender roles are grounded in the will. Hence, exceptional women, by their actions, can choose to demonstrate male virtue. As a result, belonging to a particular gender cannot be guaranteed: men risk displaying a “womanly” nature if they fail to maintain their strong posture and control their “feminizing” emotions. I would add that this gender trouble is dramatized in Corneille’s *Horace*: Horace tragically fails to sustain his performance of *vertu* whereas his sister Camille displays male constancy.

This gender instability is reinforced in André Du Laurens’ *Discours des maladies melancoliques*, the first medical treatise on mental health written in the vernacular. Du Laurens categorizes pathological melancholia as “hypochondriacal,” meaning that it emanates from the organs below the diaphragm, particularly the uterus. Thus, men who succumb to *tristesse* may as well be dressed as eunuchs or castrated. However, they can avoid this fate by eschewing melancholia and embracing *vertu*. For Du Vair and Du Laurens, then, gender differences are not uniquely grounded in the body. Yet as Wilkin points out, women do not escape the strictures of gender so easily: “no Stoic would arrive at the conclusion that ‘l’esprit n’a point de sexe’ because they viewed sex as the body’s reflection of a non-corporeal nature that was already gendered” (139).

Chapter 4, “The Suspension of Difference: Michel de Montaigne’s *Lame Lovers*,” examines “the intertwining development of pro-woman polemic and the rise of skepticism in Renaissance France” (143). Wilkin sandwiches her analysis of Montaigne between two works relating to the contemporaneous *querelle des femmes*: Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim’s *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (1529) and Marie de Gournay’s *De l’égalité des hommes et des femmes* (1622). The set-up discussion of Agrippa allows Wilkin to clarify the opposing uses of skeptical argumentation in this period. Agrippa’s skeptical discourse furthers his fideist attack on the arrogance of vain philosophers who try to oppose reason to the word of God. In contrast, according to Wilkin, Montaigne’s skepticism is not primarily Christian in nature. As she correctly points out, Montaigne’s “Apologie de Raymond de Sebond” is not a true apology but a sly critique of fideism. Rather, Montaigne’s skepticism derives from his reading of Sextus Empiricus, whose *Pyrrhoniae hypotoses* (Outlines of Pyrrhonism) lays out a method for Skeptical practice. Its purpose is not to uphold Christianity but to attain personal tranquility. Montaigne had quotes from Sextus carved into the beams of his study, such as “I suspend judgment.”

Bringing gender back into play, Wilkin argues that “Montaigne’s inversion of the values that other philosophers assigned to masculinity and

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femininity is among the most thorough expressions of his skepticism” (148). Montaigne demolishes Stoic ethics by undermining the notion of “male” virtue on which it rests. Already in his 1st essay, “By Diverse Means We Arrive at the Same Ends,” Montaigne targets stoicism as a cause of violence rather than a solution for it: showing constancy (or prideful obstinacy) before your enemy may get you tortured. Wilkin’s analysis of later interpolations reveals how Montaigne’s incorporation of gender into this essay became bolder and more direct—a vehicle for skepticism rather than just a critique of stoic ethics. For example, “feminine” *mollesse* is recast as a virtue because flexibility and receptivity to impressions protect against rigidity of thought. This flexibility is literally displayed in “Of Cripples” by the buskin that fits either foot (or either sex): like our understanding, it is “double and diverse” (quoted in Wilkin, 174).

Despite his speculations about the flexibility of gender, Montaigne is not interested in changing social practice. In 1.23, “Of Custom and Not Easily Changing an Accepted Law,” he argues that given the confusing variety of customs, it is best to retain the ones we are familiar with. However, the deconstruction of gender hierarchy in “Of Cripples” lays the groundwork for early feminist works like Gournay’s *De l’égalité des hommes et des femmes*. Unlike Montaigne himself (and Pascal later on), Montaigne’s covenant daughter will not merely relativize customary gender views, but condemn them.

The concluding chapter challenges what Wilkin considers “the dominant feminist interpretation of Cartesian philosophy,” according to which Cartesian dualism continues to exclude women. Wilkin cannot deny the weakness of some of Descartes’ statements: to claim that “even” women may possess reason is hardly a wholehearted endorsement of gender equality. Descartes also stated that he toned down some of the *Discours de la méthode* because “I was afraid that weak minds might avidly embrace the doubt and scruples which I had to propound” without following his ensuing counter-argument. However, Wilkin avers that by labeling women’s minds as “weak,” Descartes is merely following readers’ prejudices. In his correspondence with Elizabeth of Bohemia, Descartes shows himself to be more open than in his published works, arguing that qualities of mind are gender free. Poullain de la Barre will take up this argument, famously declaring “the mind has no sex.” I do not totally agree with Wilkin’s critique of Erica Harth—whose *Cartesian Women* Wilkin nevertheless deems “excellent.” Before Wilkin, Harth had recognized the heuristic value and reformist potential of Cartesian rationalism. Albeit

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“conventional and ambivalent,” Descartes’ philosophy opens the door to women as thinking subjects rather than mere counters or boundary markers in a masculine enterprise of truth seeking. Wilkin’s research shows that, unfortunately, “during the late Renaissance, the exclusion of women from the search for truth was not contingent upon a particular epistemology” (94); yet both Montaigne and Descartes supplied fuel for future pro(to) feminist writing.

In conclusion, Wilkin’s erudition and textual acumen are revealed in her analyses of early modern medical, philosophical, rhetorical and political treatises. She also shows a thorough understanding of classical, medieval and Renaissance thought. Wilkin lightens the difficulty of her topic with witty wordplay, such as “the toxic unctuousness of ultramontane persuasion” (38) and “a rag-tag gaggle of raving hags” (48). While not easy to read or summarize, this important book merits study by philosophers and historians of science as well as scholars of literature and gender studies.

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Seifert, Lewis C. *Manning the Margins: Masculinity & Writing in Seventeenth-Century France* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-472-07058-1. Pp. 339. \$29.95.

Culture’s most normatively empowered positions can also be its most ambiguous, unstable, and imperiled. Such is the condition of masculinity in seventeenth-century France, according to Lewis C. Seifert’s lucid and far-ranging study of the *grand siècle*’s literary ideals of *honnêteté*, effeminacy, homosexuality, transvestism, and other seeming limit-versions of manliness. Written with precision, clarity, and humility before a surprisingly complex subject, *Manning the Margins* has much to recommend it, equally for specialists as for scholars of sexuality studies or those interested more generally in the way texts mediate the cultural field.

Seifert’s project is to elucidate the ways in which masculinity, despite its constitutive pretense to dominion, instead is defined dialectically—between dominance and submission—and therefore appears “variable, multiple, and contingent” (2) in its meanings and forms. Tracing the deep threads of uncertainty that betray the precarious position of the masculine ideal, Seifert engages with historical figures (the chevalier de Méré, Vincent Voiture, Théophile de Viau), texts (plays by Molière, Scudéry’s

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Clélie, “Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville”), and the literary historical record. Through this multi-faceted approach, Seifert's is part of a current strain of research striving to destabilize the view of seventeenth-century France as a homogeneous culture defined by a rigid hierarchy. France, both before and during the reign of Louis XIV, emerges as a site of ambiguities, tensions, and evolving cultural figures. Seifert's contribution to this body of work is unique, however, since he is offering a work of what might be called literary historical sociology. Following distantly and somewhat critically on the heels of Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, Seifert revises their models of, respectively, “court society” and “masculine habitus” while bringing to bear contemporary advances in North-American feminist studies on classic French culture. In turn, masculinity studies has much to learn from this study.

Divided into two parts, *Manning The Margins* explores, in the first four chapters, elite construction of masculinity, first through the figure of the *honnête* gentleman and then through the dynamic fortunes of *salon* masculinity through more specific cases. Scholars outside our field might benefit most from this first section, with its critique of the question of “civility,” a topic well-known to scholars in our field but less studied outside of it. Seifert starts with a simple enough observation: that the honorable gentleman is a gendered construct, and that codes of civility which guide his ideal behavior and social position are also inflected by the vulnerable status of masculinity. Recently, scholarship on civility has emphasized how, as a uniquely French phenomenon it ensured increased liberty and pleasure for both women and men (Habib, Viala). In contrast, Seifert shows how the specter of effeminacy created constraints for both men and women. In doing so, he both offers a subtle critique of recent European trends that seek to rehabilitate the habits of elite social practices as a model for respectful and meaningful heterosociability today.

The second section, with chapters focusing on marginal sexuality practices, also places the seventeenth century's own contestation of marginal sexualities in conversation with our own. Here, Seifert's approach to literary history shines through on each page; the methodological combination of reading the literary texts alongside careful attention to the pock-marked and inconclusive archive for such figures as the abbé de Boisrobert, Théophile de Viau or the abbé de Choisy (and authors associated with them) is a model of patience and clarity. This is the kind of book where a specialist reader will be engrossed by even the footnotes. In the spirit of other recent works on masculinity and literature (LaGuardia, Reeser) in which poetry or prose is less a medium for contestation or refusal than for an ex-

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ploration of the limits of one's gendered positions, Seifert's presentation of the sodomite and the cross-dresser's literary imaginings suggests a desire to write instability and dynamism. Instead of seeing these ambivalent, nameless positions as failures or insufficiencies, Seifert makes the case for their very searching fluidity as one of the key early modern "sources of the self" (Taylor).

Manning the Margins offers a measured and thorough critique of some long-standing concepts informing our view of the Classical Age, from civility to salon culture to the role of the marginal writer, and does so by opening up the historical and literary archive for our renewed attention. But—perhaps equally significantly—it is also a model of literary history, where the historical archive and the search for a definitive answer about what might have been are treated as precisely, but as ambivalently, as the construction of masculinity. In this regard, the chapter on Voiture is a model of a new kind of reception history that respects literary aesthetics as well as the shifting ground of the archive itself: thus the tension between Voiture's close association with women and the later attempts to distance him from the effeminate becomes an aesthetic created by his own writing, by that of his contemporaries, but also by his nephew Pinchesne and subsequent commentators such as La Bruyère (115). Through Voiture's shifting masculinity the *grand siècle* itself is shown to be a multi-layered construction. The University of Michigan Press should also be commended for producing such a beautifully edited book, with an excellent index and clear footnotes—a paratextual apparatus that, while marginal, affords a dynamic and fluid reading of Seifert's scholarship.

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Goldstein, Claire. *Vaux and Versailles: The Appropriations, Erasures, and Accidents That Made Modern France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8122-4058-0. Pp 270. \$59.95

In December of 1661, Finance Minister Nicholas Fouquet was arrested in Nantes, at the orders of Louis XIV, charged with embezzlement and lèse-majesté, and eventually sentenced to life in prison. The team of artists who had created Fouquet's Vaux-le-Vicomte and sustained its brilliant culture (Félibien, La Fontaine, Le Brun, Le Nôtre, Le Vau, , Scudéry, and others) was recruited by Louis to build Versailles and celebrate his glory, even as hundreds of orange trees and other plants were uprooted from Vaux and transplanted to Versailles. Fouquet's arrest, graven in the memory of contemporary dix-septiémistes by the opening scenes of Rossellini's *La Prise de pouvoir*, signifies, in the heroic narrative of the Sun King, the bold decision by the young king to govern alone and inaugurate the process of creating, *ex nihilo*, the modern absolutist state; a mercantilist empire; and a unique French classical style in architecture, garden design, dance, painting, political spectacle, and literature.

Claire Goldstein's *Vaux and Versailles* revisits Fouquet's arrest and the confiscation of his cultural and political vision by Louis XIV, in order to ascertain what aspects of what became known as classicism were derived from Vaux. "The appropriation and erasure of Fouquet's daring *roturier* project made possible Louis XIV's consolidation of the modern nation-state. Vaux provided the king a medium and a vocabulary with which to write the rule of his *grand siècle* ..." (176). Analyzing the work of artists the king stole from Fouquet, Goldstein contrasts their work at Vaux, under the friendly patronage of a finance minister who himself composed rimes and enigmas and created an atmosphere of emulation and collaboration, with their work at Versailles, where an atmosphere of conformity, ambition, repetitious panegyric, as well as the colossal scale of the new château and park, lead to feelings of anxiety and paranoia. In a series of parallels, we see, in every case, the original idea at Vaux and its replication at Versailles.

Chapter one examines Moliere's *Facheux*, performed at Vaux in August of 1661, as part of the lavish fête for the king, contrasted with its performance three years later as part of the *Plaisirs de l'île enchantée*. Subsequent chapters analyze Mme de Villedieu's *Favory*, tapestries de-

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signed by Le Brun for Vaux and Versailles, literary visits to Versailles by Félibien, La Fontaine, and Mlle de Scudéry, Neptune's Grotto at Vaux, explicated by La Fontaine in *Le Songe de Vaux*, the Grotte de Thétis and commentary by Félibien, and a concluding chapter on La Quintinie and horticulture.

At Vaux, Molière's comédie-ballet gently ridiculed its courtier audience for their slavish conformity to fashion and manners, while at Versailles the same play was used, paradoxically, to enforce rigid conformity to such manners. Molière effected this change in perspective and meaning by adding a new prologue designating the king as the author of the play, a role reinforced by his elevated position as spectator of the play during the fête. Goldstein skillfully explains the political work of the fête, which, by means of lavish gardens, hydraulic fountains, and poetic conceits transforming Louis and Fouquet into Hercules, Apollo, or Alexander, "forged equivalence between the host and his domain." Evocative details unearthed by the author concerning the staging of the fête explain how such equivalences were formed, "... Molière's troupe make their entrance out of machines engineered to look like garden statues and trees" (35). There are many such vivid moments of historical re-creation in the book that succeed in capturing and reproducing the "plaisir," "merveilleux," and "enchantement" that poems, paintings, fountains, and tapestries from the period sought to evoke. Two such moments are the treatment of Le Brun's paintings in the Salon des Muses at Vaux and the grottos of Neptune and Thetis at Vaux and Versailles. After a thorough explanation of the manufacturing process of tapestries at Vaux, Goldstein presents Le Brun's painting of the victory of the muses over the other arts, "at the literal summit of the room" (72). The salon is carefully reconstructed architecturally followed by a vision of the salon through the eyes of the dream-narrator of La Fontaine's *Songe de Vaux*, who, upon entering the room, feels his soul filled with an inexpressible sweetness similar to what he had experienced in the physical presence of the muses, "sous le plus bel ombrage de l'Hélicon." Looking at Le Brun's painting, the dream-narrator is thrilled to see the muses "logées dans l'une des plus belles chambres [du] palais" (74). Through the work of Le Brun, La Fontaine (and its careful reconstitution by Goldstein), we share in La Fontaine's vision of the muses taking up residence in Fouquet's château.

The work of decoding and interpreting such expertly reconstructed scenes is equally lucid and cogent. We are told that Félibien's ecstatic praise of the king seems "comically hyperbolic" (105); careful readings of prefaces and dedications to the king reveal, however, that the monarch

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was theorized and celebrated as both the *author* and the *aim* of all artistic production at Versailles, the “efficient and final cause” of spectacles in Aristotelian terms. The melding of the natural and the artificial in garden theory is similarly well explained. According to the traditional presentation of this trope, Nature and Art are combined by garden artists to form a “third nature.” At Versailles, however, this idea was superseded by the theory of the king who operates independently, according to his own art, without the necessity of nature, at liberty to fabricate his own exterior environment. Many of these ideas seem extravagant, Goldstein explains, when applied to the individual man who was king; however, when related to the infinite, meta-subject created by the *fiction* of the king, such extravagant ideas produced powerful emotions and deep identifications.

Vaux and Versailles is an exemplary interdisciplinary work that opens up many new fields of enquiry; it brings the spatial turn in recent theory to bear, very creatively, to early modern France; the book restores Vaux to its rightful place in architectural and cultural history and proposes the *promeneur* of Vaux and Versailles as an interesting counterpart and forerunner to the *flâneur* of modern Paris, London, and Berlin. The only argument I found myself resisting in this work is its insistence on the originality and ideality of Vaux, at the expense of a totally derivative and dystopic Versailles. Vaux is a “troubling forebear” that “haunts” and “destabilizes” Versailles. Formerly autonomous artists are robbed of their individual voices at Versailles, whose gardens are “illegible and anxiogenic.”

The disappearance of the individual courtier into the royal essence at Versailles had its progressive and historically inevitable aspects. Such collective fusion inspired emotional and aesthetic responses that were as intense and authentic as the experiences Fouquet created at Vaux. Where Goldstein sees erasure, theft, and destruction of an artistic heritage, one could also see continuation and reabsorption, as the Bourbon kings, through their appropriation of Vaux, continued to forge an alliance with the noblesse de robe and the rising middle class.

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Greenberg, Mitchell. *Racine: From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. ISBN 9780816660841. Pp. xvi + 287. \$25.00.

In *Racine: From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, Mitchell Greenberg connects the mythic dimension of Racine's tragedies to their political

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implications, tracing the significance of the Œdipus myth through most of Racine's theater—*Les Plaideurs* and *Alexandre le Grand* are not discussed. The first chapter, on *La Thébaine*, shows how Racine's first play stages the triumph of chaos over culture. For Greenberg, *La Thébaine* is not just a young playwright's initial foray; the tragedy and the myths behind it are foundational for Racine's theater.

In the second chapter, on *Andromaque*, Greenberg argues for the central importance of visual metaphors in the 1667 tragedy. Through distorted and non-reciprocal gazes, Racine's characters struggle with their desire for identity unity, a desire constantly frustrated by their fractured subjectivities. The third chapter focuses on *Britannicus* and on what the author considers the most perverse couple in Racine's tragedy, Néron and his mother Agrippine. An interesting feature of this section is Greenberg's focus on the interrogative mode as expressive of the connections between desire and power: "Quoi? Tandis que Néron s'abandonne au sommeil / Faut-il que vous veniez attendre son réveil?" (1.1.1–2).

The fourth chapter includes readings of *Bérénice*, *Bajazet*, and *Mithridate*: "each in its own (tragic) way traces through the sexualization of its political plot the tenuous but necessary triumph of an idealized Western (Christian) monarchy over an Oriental (barbarian/Muslim) despotism" (119). Greenberg reads the protagonist Bérénice as a simultaneously passive and phallic woman—it is this duality that makes her an irreducible and persistently appealing character. With *Bajazet*, "more self-consciously than in his other plays, Racine makes voyeurs of his audience" as they contemplate "the other" in the form of the phallic Oriental woman, Roxane (136). Greenberg incisively revisits the openness of the ending of *Mithridate*, where the rebel king reappears only in order to disappear, thus suggesting, exceptionally for the Racinean tragic universe, the promise of a future. Chapter five gives a psychoanalytical reading of sacrifice in *Iphigénie*. The altar, absent from the stage but ever-present in the spectator's imagination, marks the ambivalent point where an emerging nation contemplates both its troubled origins and its proleptic fate.

The sixth chapter, on *Phèdre*, examines how law and politics attempt and fail to contain a sexuality that is figured as monstrous and gendered female. In a useful heuristic pairing, Greenberg proposes to see "Phèdre and Hippolyte as but two differently gendered variations of the same, that is, a bisexual figuration, a two-headed monster of recalcitrant sexuality" (208). The characters dramatize the internal, and thus modern, struggles of the subject under seventeenth-century absolutism, a system based on the desire for unity but fractured from within by subjective multiplicity. A

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new reading of Thésée's role maintains that, by embracing Aricie's family, the king undergoes the transformation from archaic ruler to modern subject, "from a figure of mythology to the architect of democracy" (225). In the wake of the sacrifice of the dyad Phèdre/Hippolyte, Athens, and by extension France, moves from mythology into history. In the final chapter on the sacred tragedies, Greenberg contends that the elements of psychosexual disorder that seem to come under the tighter control of Biblical cosmology still threaten to re-emerge to disrupt absolutist order. The fundamental tensions of Racine's tragic world, expressed most clearly for Greenberg in the Œdipus myth, remain unresolved.

This thought-provoking study builds on arguments previously elaborated in Greenberg's *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-Century Drama and Prose, Canonical States, Canonical Stages, and Baroque Bodies*. While the theoretical developments and textual analyses are presented in a convincing and engaging way, multiple errors in transcription of passages from Racine's plays produce at times a jarring effect for the reader. More than a fourth of offset quotations from primary sources contain errors, some of them affecting versification. For example, line 1.1.82 from *Phèdre* reads: "Et la Crète fumant du sang du Minotauro..." More careful copyediting would have improved the book's readability. Nonetheless, the reconsideration of Racine's tragedies in the light of Freudian analysis that this study proposes makes a strong and provocative contribution to the field of early modern theater studies. The book will appeal to students and scholars interested not only in early modern theater but also in the political culture of absolutism.

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